Board of Directors Minutes

September 19, 2025

Members in Attendance

Nicole Russo, Microboard

Bing Carbone, Modern Plastics	Cindy Rafael, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
Jillian Baldwin, Park City Communities	Dennis Yaremich, Sikorsky Aircraft
LindyLee Gold, CT Dept of Economic Development	Mary Burgard, Dept of Rehabilitation Services
Mike Proto, Prestige Industrial Finishing	Pablo Colon, Avangrid
Victor Fuda, CT Dept of Labor	Meghan Hopkins, Operations Inc.
Juvenel Levros, New Haven Job Corp	Julie DeMarco, Bigelow Center for Senior Activities
Fred Gill, Gateway Community College	Jim Oddo, Executive Search Professionals LLC
Bruce Silverstone, Silverstone Consulting	John Loeser, Consultant
Matthew Seebeck, The SoNo Collection	George Anderson, Synchrony Bank

Board Chair, Nicole Russo, called the meeting to order at 8:16 AM, confirming a quorum was present.

President's Report

President and CEO, Joe Carbone began his report by recognizing the passing of two individuals who had a significant impact on The WorkPlace and the broader community.

He first honored Larry Bentley, who served on The WorkPlace's Board of Directors for approximately 25 years, many of those years on the Executive Committee. Mr. Bentley was described as a civic leader who was deeply involved in the City of Norwalk, serving on numerous boards. Professionally, he rose through the Norwalk public school system, went on to a career in banking, and became the first African American president of a commercial bank in the state. Mr. Carbone remarked on Mr. Bentley's long-standing support of The WorkPlace, his wise counsel, and his kindness, stating he was "a gentleman and a gentleman," and expressed deep appreciation for his years of service.

Mr. Carbone then paid tribute to Bill Gerber, who was serving in his first term as First Selectman of Fairfield. Mr. Carbone recalled meeting him shortly after his election and was impressed with how well-prepared and knowledgeable he already was about workforce development issues. Mr. Gerber was described as joyful, energetic, and eager to partner with The WorkPlace. Mr. Carbone noted the suddenness of his illness and passing and expressed that his death was a significant loss to the community and to The WorkPlace as a future partner.

Turning to national policy, Mr. Carbone addressed what he characterized as a troubling "void" in federal workforce leadership, particularly from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL). He reported that in the current calendar year there had not been a single federal competitive grant opportunity for workforce development from USDOL, which he described as unprecedented. He noted that the American Talent Strategy, intended to coordinate job training across the Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education, had been announced but not meaningfully implemented. As a result, local and regional entities such as The WorkPlace must increasingly rely on their own initiatives and partnerships to address workforce needs.

In contrast to the lack of federal momentum, Mr. Carbone reported that economic indicators remain very strong. National unemployment has hovered around 4% for several years, the longest sustained period at that level in modern history, which is generally considered full employment. Connecticut's unemployment rate is even lower, and the labor market in The WorkPlace's 20-town region is extremely tight, signaling a strong demand for workers. At the same time, the State of Connecticut has been upgraded multiple times by major credit rating agencies since Governor Lamont took office. These upgrades reflect solid fiscal management, including rebuilding reserves, strengthening the pension system, and maintaining a good quality of life. Mr. Carbone commended Governor Lamont and his administration for restoring the state's fiscal position and contributing to a stable environment that supports workforce and economic development.

Despite this generally positive macroeconomic picture, Mr. Carbone cautioned that long-term unemployment and underemployment are growing concerns. He noted that approximately one quarter of unemployed individuals have been out of work for 27 weeks or longer, compared to about 21% a year ago. He highlighted that the share of long-term unemployed individuals with college degrees has increased significantly over the past decade, rising from about 20% to approximately 33%. He also pointed to broader measures of labor underutilization (such as U-6) that show higher levels when underemployment and marginal attachment to the labor force are accounted for. These trends suggest that there is a growing and "hidden" population that is not benefiting to the same degree from the strong economy.

Mr. Carbone discussed several contributing factors to long-term unemployment, including sectoral imbalance, global economic uncertainties, and technological change. He placed special emphasis on the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation. He cited a Microsoft study identifying dozens of occupations at risk of elimination or significant transformation due to AI and noted that AI can increase productivity with fewer workers. While this may help businesses remain competitive globally, it also intensifies concerns about job displacement for many workers. He observed that many job seekers are fearful about how AI will affect their careers and stressed that The WorkPlace has a responsibility to help individuals gain the skills and credentials they need to remain competitive.

In response, Mr. Carbone outlined his vision for transforming the American Job Center (AJC) in Bridgeport. Historically, AJCs have been thought of as places where individuals file for unemployment benefits and search for job leads. He argued that, given worker shortages and the changing nature of work, AJCs must now become dynamic hubs that attract not only unemployed individuals but also underemployed workers and those seeking advancement. He indicated that The WorkPlace is close to finalizing a major initiative in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Labor to create a premier, nationally recognized American Job Center. The goal is for the center to be a place that visitors from across the country will want to emulate, reflecting leading practices in AI integration, career development, and employer engagement. Although details could not yet be publicly shared, Mr. Carbone expressed confidence that more information would be available in the near future and that this initiative will be transformative for the region.

Mr. Carbone also reported on the Platform to Employment Youth initiative. Building on the success of the original Platform to Employment program developed during the Great Recession, The WorkPlace is now applying this model to young people. Citing the Dalio Foundation’s findings that approximately 50,000 young adults in Connecticut have completed high school but have no postsecondary plans and are unemployed or underemployed, he explained that the Platform to Employment Youth program is designed to reconnect this population to the labor market. The program has recently received an additional $1 million from the Connecticut General Assembly and $1.5 million from the DeLuca Foundation to support expansion across the state. Mr. Carbone emphasized that every young person successfully connected to training and employment benefits not only themselves, but also their families, communities, and the broader economy, especially in a period of sustained worker shortages.

He then highlighted The WorkPlace’s long-term success with Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF). The organization has served as the regional coordinator for this program for 14 consecutive years, assisting over 3,000 veteran families in New Haven and Fairfield counties with housing and supportive services. Mr. Carbone noted that the program has been consistently renewed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which reflects both strong outcomes and careful stewardship of federal funds. He praised the staff, particularly the case workers and managers, for their dedication to veterans and their families.
Mr. Carbone informed the Board that he has been appointed to the Connecticut Clean Energy Council, established by the General Assembly to coordinate efforts in a sector that already supports more than 40,000 jobs in the state. He expressed his intention to advocate for The WorkPlace to serve as a central training partner for clean energy jobs, ensuring that employers

have access to a skilled workforce and that residents have access to high-quality, well-paying careers in this growing industry.

Finally, Mr. Carbone spoke about The WorkPlace's ongoing commitment to being "driven to serve" and entrepreneurial in its pursuit of resources beyond formula funding. He explained that the organization continues to seek competitive grants, philanthropic support, and fee-for-service opportunities to respond quickly to community needs and pursue innovative solutions. Over the past 25 years, The WorkPlace has raised approximately $408 million in such external resources, which has translated into direct assistance and opportunities for thousands of individuals. He concluded his report by affirming his confidence in the future of the organization, its staff, and its partners, even in the absence of strong federal leadership in workforce development.

Board Business

I. Approval of Minutes
   a. Motion to approve the June 20, 2025, minutes made, seconded, and carried unanimously.
II. Consent Agenda
   a. The agenda included approvals from executive committee meetings (June to September) with a resolution affirming the authority of President and CEO Joseph Carbone to continue signing contracts on behalf of The WorkPlace and a motion authorizing the President and CEO to provide staff bonuses in accordance with The WorkPlace's policies and Executive Committee authorization.
   b. The motion moved, seconded, and carried unanimously, with no nays and no abstentions.

Program Highlights

Chair Russo then turned the meeting over to COO, Adrienne Parkmond, to present program highlights. Ms. Parkmond introduced Michael Hayden and Leigh Roberts, who provided an update on the Career Connect initiative, funded through the state's allocation of ARPA dollars and administered by the Connecticut Office of Workforce Strategy.

Career Connect | Workforce Development

Michael Hayden, Senior Vice President of Workforce Development, reported on outcomes for the Career Connect programs serving sectors such as remote work, manufacturing, green jobs, CDL, and information technology. The program period ran from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2025.

He explained that Remote Works prepares individuals for success in remote and hybrid work environments through a five-week virtual cohort model that combines instructor-led sessions with self-paced LinkedIn Learning modules, health and wellness content, and career development activities. Participants learn resume and cover letter preparation, interviewing skills, job search strategies, and wage negotiation, and receive LinkedIn Learning access for one year.

Across all sectors, The WorkPlace enrolled 464 participants in Career Connect-funded training during this period. Participants were trained in CDL (A and B), manufacturing (including CNC and machining technologies), green jobs (such as line worker training in partnership with Eversource, UI, and Housatonic Community College), information technology, and remote work. Mr. Hayden reported that 76 graduates were already employed in either their training-related industry or in a new, related field, with many others continuing in job search and placement services. Wage outcomes varied by sector but included positions paying from approximately $20 per hour to more than $70 per hour in certain IT roles, and over $40 per hour in some green jobs. Employers hiring Career Connect graduates included Town Fair Tire, Lockheed Martin, Schneider, Prime Inc., Verizon, Tech Systems, Eversource, UI, Amtrak, and several banks, manufacturers, and service companies.

Mr. Hayden emphasized that success in these programs depends not only on technical training but also on the “beyond training” supports that The WorkPlace provides. These supports include a soft skills boot camp that covers communication, time management, teamwork, and professionalism, as well as a virtual job club that offers ongoing coaching, accountability, and mini training on resumes, interviews, and labor market trends. Participants also receive seasonal newsletters with job leads, hiring trends, and practical tips.

He then highlighted several participant success stories, including individuals who progressed from warehouse work to higher-paid technical roles, from informal “odd jobs” to formal employment as lineman trainees, and from homelessness to stable, skilled employment as a service technician. Mr. Hayden reported that The WorkPlace has received extensions for certain Career Connect components, particularly manufacturing and green sector training, allowing additional cohorts to be enrolled through June 2026. New cohorts have already launched in manufacturing, and additional line workers and green training is planned in partnership with Eversource and others.

Mr. Hayden concluded by noting that The WorkPlace is not focused solely on helping people secure jobs but on helping them build careers that can sustain themselves and their families over the long term.

Career Connect | Health Career Academy

Ms. Leigh Roberts, Vice President of Workforce Development, presented on the Health Career Academy, for which The WorkPlace serves as the lead workforce development board for the healthcare sector statewide.

She reported that, under Career Connect, the Health Career Academy began in July 2022 and completed its initial phase on June 30, 2025. The original goal was to enroll 740 individuals; instead, the program enrolled 905 participants from across the state, with the largest numbers coming from New Haven, Hartford, and Fairfield counties.

Training was offered in a variety of healthcare occupations, including Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), Central Sterile Processing, Medical Billing and Coding, Medical Assistant, Pharmacy Technician, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). The training combined classroom instruction with clinical experience, wraparound support, and mandatory career readiness workshops on topics such as resume and cover letter writing, HIPAA, customer service, and diversity in healthcare. The program's goal was to train 598 individuals; it ultimately trained 633 participants, with approximately 70% completing their credential or training pathway.

Ms. Roberts reported that the employment placement goal was 598. As of June 30, 2025, the program had placed 578 participants into employment, and by August 1, placements had increased to 602, thereby exceeding the goal. Participants secured employment with a range of employers, including Apple Rehab, Hartford HealthCare, Yale New Haven Health, AFC Urgent Care, CVS, Walgreens, and Middlesex Hospital. Across all pathways, the average wage was approximately $19.57 per hour, and retention was strong, with about 92% of participants employed at six months, nearly 87% at 12 months, and 81% at 18 months.

She also described The WorkPlace's rapid response to the abrupt closure of Stone Academy in 2023, which left many nursing students locked out and facing substantial student loan debt. Through the Health Career Academy and Career Connect funding, The WorkPlace was able to assist displaced Stone Academy students in continuing their education and completing LPN training. Sixteen such students successfully became LPNs and are now earning average wages of approximately $32.37 per hour.

Ms. Roberts shared several participant testimonials describing how the program helped clients overcome barriers such as eviction risk, lack of transportation, lack of equipment and clothing for clinicals, and the challenges of single parenthood. Through counseling, supportive services, and training, these participants were able to complete their certifications, obtain licenses, and move into stable, full-time healthcare employment. She also highlighted feedback from employers, including comments from the owner of Comfort Care Home Care, who praised The WorkPlace as an excellent partner for connecting qualified candidates with growing opportunities in home care.

The Health Career Academy has received an extension through June 30, 2026, and currently has additional cohorts underway or beginning in CNA, ophthalmic technician, pharmacy technician, administrative medical assistant, dental assistant, and other roles, offered in collaboration with community colleges and community-based providers. Ms. Roberts closed by noting that the Health Career Academy is an example of how The WorkPlace advances President Carbone's goal of "providing access to the America promised to all."

Ms. Parkmond thanked both presenters and their teams for their work and expressed appreciation to the Office of Workforce Strategy for trusting The WorkPlace with statewide implementation of health sector training through Career Connect.

Closing Remarks

Chair Nicole Russo thanked all presenters for their thorough and inspiring reports. She shared that she is reading a book titled *Who Believed in You?*, by Dina Powell, which focuses on the impact of mentors and champions in people's lives. She remarked that the stories in the book reflect what The WorkPlace does every day with staff and partners believing in people, investing in them, and helping them move forward. She encouraged others to read the book as well.

Ms. Russo then briefly noted a lighter point of pride for Connecticut: the state recently achieved a Guinness World Record for the most people eating pizza simultaneously, serving 10,000 slices to 4,525 people. She observed that as summer ends and the beaches get colder, residents and visitors alike can continue to enjoy Connecticut through its many "trails," including pizza, vineyard, hiking, and oyster trails. She expressed her appreciation for working with the Board, staff, and partners, and reiterated her admiration for The WorkPlace's accomplishments under the leadership of Joe Carbone, Adrienne Parkmond and their team.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26 AM.